

English Literature

Description of the Examination

The Subject Examination in English Literature covers the material usually taught in a two-semester course (or the equivalent) at the college level. The test is primarily concerned with major authors and literary works, but it also includes questions on some minor writers. Candidates are expected to be acquainted with common literary themes, common literary terms, such as metaphor and personification, and basic literary forms, such as the sonnet and ballad.

In both coverage and approach, the exam resembles the historically organized survey of English literature offered by many colleges that deals with literature from Beowulf to the present. It assumes that the candidate has read widely and developed an appreciation of English literature, knows the basic literary periods, has a sense of the historical development of English literature, and is able to identify the author of a representative quotation or to recognize the period in which an excerpt was written.

The exam consists of approximately 105 multiple-choice questions to be answered in two separately timed 45-minute sections.

An optional essay section also can be taken in addition to the multiple-choice test. The essay section is graded by the institution that requests it. Contact the school where you would like to receive credit for your CLEP exam to see if it requires the optional essay section for this exam.

Knowledge and Skills Required

The English Literature exam requires the following knowledge and abilities. The percentages at the left show the relative emphasis given to knowledge and ability, but most questions draw on both.

Approximate Percent of Examination

45%	Knowledge of information related to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Literary backgroundIdentification of authorsMetrical patternsLiterary references
55%	Ability to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Analyze the elements of form in a literary passagePerceive meaningsIdentify tone and moodFollow patterns of imageryIdentify characteristics of style

Study Resources

To prepare for the English Literature exam, you should read critically the contents of at least one anthology, many of which are used as textbooks in English literature courses at

the college level. Visit your local college bookstore to determine which anthologies and textbooks are used by the college for English Literature courses.

Most textbook anthologies contain a representative sample of readings as well as discussions of historical background, literary styles and devices characteristic of various authors and periods, and other material relevant to the test. The anthologies do vary somewhat in content, approach, and emphasis, and you are therefore advised to consult more than one anthology or some specialized books on major authors, periods, and literary forms and terminology. When selecting a more specialized book, check the table of contents against the "Knowledge and Skills Required" section. You should also read some of the major novels that are mentioned or excerpted in the anthologies. You can probably obtain an extensive reading list of English literature from a college English department, library, or bookstore. The Internet is another resource you could explore.